

Reviews

D. CAIRNS and S. RICHARDS, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1988. 178 pages.

In the final chapter of *Writing Ireland*, Cairns and Richards claim that since the late 1960s, as a result of the economic development of the South and the crisis of Northern Ireland, Irish writers and intellectuals North and South have become engaged in a renewed process of historical excavation which is no longer aimed at erecting exclusive, essentialist definitions of national identity, but rather at a re-appraisal of national needs and purposes, and a radical re-reading of Irish history through the past 500 years, marked by what S. Deane terms the «colonial concussion». There is no doubt that this is also Cairns and Richards's aim in *Writing Ireland*, so that they stand unquestionably as inhabitants of the «fifth province» they invoke in their closing chapter, the non-sectarian cultural location for the critical alliance of Irish artists and intellectuals, North and South.

Writing Ireland is a wide-ranging, densely-packed study of the ways in which the identities of the Irish and the English, the colonised and the coloniser, have been made and re-made through discourse. The authors are consistent in their avoidance and denunciation of all forms

of essentialism, as well as conscientious and highly eloquent in their grounding of all kinds of writing in the contemporary cultural climate and material conditions. These are never presented as a mere backdrop, but as informing the writing with a specific ideological value within the current cultural struggle for the creation of a hegemonic national consciousness. Indeed, it is no coincidence that *Writing Ireland* should form part of the Cultural Politics series of Manchester U.P., which publishes texts written from a cultural materialist perspective under the general editorship of J. Dollimore and A. Sinfield.

The main focus of the authors' examination is the 19th and 20th centuries, to which six out of the seven chronologically-arranged chapters are devoted. However, the opening chapter serves as a necessary prelude where the authors outline the originary moment of the colonial relationship between England and Ireland, the 16th century, seen as the crucial period for the cultural formation of a new sense of «Englishness», at the same time as they introduce the parameters which form the basis of the interdisciplinary methodology to be used. Drawing on L. Althusser, M. Foucault, A. Gramsci, S. Greenblatt and E. Said, culture is defined as the site of the struggle for hegemony, and discourses as the primary cultural means through which

individuals are interpellated into a particular social or political position. This determines the central concern of their book: the ways in which the struggle for the taking over of discourses, for the creation of a hegemonic cultural climate, has taken place and is taking place between classes, nations, linguistic, cultural or ethnic collectivities in Ireland. The subsequent analyses are not only penetrating and cogently argued, but most thought-provoking for the reader interested in the critical examination of the discourses contending for the articulation of other national identities and actualities.

In chapter 1 the above concepts are applied to the analysis of English writing on Ireland and writing by the Irish (both Native Irish and Old English) in the 16th and early 17th centuries. Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *The Tempest* come under the authors' critical eye, as do Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, from the perspective of Greenblatt's notion of «self-fashioning» and its concomitant «otherness». Cairns and Richards are equally insightful in their examination of Irish writing in the 16th and early 17th centuries, which attempts to demonstrate that the intellectual leadership was passing from the Gaelic intelligentsia, the bards and poets, to the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church, which produced materials for the support of Catholicism in Ireland based on refuting English assertions about the Irish. The intervention of the «Repressive State Apparatuses» in Ireland from 1641 makes it clear, according to Cairns and Richards, that the colonizer's use of the persuasive «Ideological State Apparatuses» had failed. It is in this context that the authors place their subsequent discussion of the Anglo-Irish intellectuals' attempts in the 19th and early 20th centuries to forge a connection with the people-

nation which would make it possible for them to assume leadership while maintaining their material and cultural dominance.

Chapter 2 is devoted to a discussion of the cultural polemic of the poet and Gaelic scholar Sir Samuel Ferguson and of T. Davis, the leading light of the Young Ireland group, both of whom belonged to the Anglo-Irish community, the group whose privileged position was being threatened by Catholic Emancipation (1829), the 1832 Reform Bill and the Repeal Movement among others. As Cairns and Richards claim, an understanding of Ferguson's cultural strategy, based on appropriating the cultural products of Ireland's past for the Ascendancy so as to counter the mobilization of the past by Catholics, is essential in order to grasp W.B. Yeats's «Irishness», a question to which much attention is devoted in chapters 4, 5, and 6. On the other hand, Cairns and Richards show how Davis's attempt at constructing a cross-sectarian alliance between middle-class Protestants and Catholics by displacing religion from its central role in the production of identity inevitably led to the confrontation between him and O'Connell. In chapter 3, a fascinating account of the political implications of M. Arnold's creation of the discourse of Celticism, predicated on an anti-democratic and anti-materialist stance, is followed by an examination of the task of S. O'Grady, the link between Arnold and the Anglo-Irish Revival of the 1890s, who, in the context of growing Irish republicanism and increasing pressure from the Land League, sought to mobilize the Irish literature written before the English invasions for the benefit of the Ascendancy.

Chapters 4 and 5 are an absorbing guide to the complexities of the events and cultural climate leading up to the Easter Rising of 1916. Rather than seeing

the 1890s Revival as a unified movement and as the precursor of the Rising, the authors' contention is that it should be regarded as the culminating episode in a cultural struggle for the articulation of the people-nation, mostly formed by tenant farmers and shopkeepers, fought between the Anglo-Irish intellectuals and voices emanating from within the people-nation itself. It is argued that all those who would lead the people-nation were interpellated by the mutually interdependent discourses of familism, Catholicism and sexuality, responses to which included, among others, D. Hyde's definition of Irish nationality; W.B. Yeats's career from the 1880s to 1907, which the authors see as an attempt to enable the fusion of the Anglo-Irish with the people-nation by re-making the latter either as Arnoldian «Celts» or as noble peasants, in both cases ignoring contemporary party politics and material conditions; and G. Moore, J.M. Synge and J. Joyce, whom Cairns and Richards see as united by a demand for personal and sexual freedom which posed a serious threat to Catholic nationalist Ireland and to the discourses on which it depended.

Chapter 5 turns to the voices emerging from the people-nation and begins with an examination of the attempts on the part of D.P. Moran, A. Griffith and J. Connolly to offer alternatives to the parliamentarism of the United Irish League (U.I.L.) after its formation in 1898. It is argued the continuing hegemony of the U.I.L. marginalised all of these alternatives, just as it also marginalised Anglo-Irish intellectuals, such as Yeats. As opposed to all these frustrated attempts to challenge the dominance of the U.I.L., Cairns and Richards claim that the artist-intellectuals of the 1916 Rising succeeded in mobilizing the people-nation by drawing upon fundamentalist principles, namely, by invoking Catholicism

and rejecting the Celtic mysticism of the Anglo-Irish writers. Similarly they argue that the pagan ritual of sacrifice which resonates through the Rising and in the work of the 1916 poets is firmly grounded in Catholicism, thus drawing a distinction between this motif as found in the Anglo-Irish and in the Irish-Irish Revivals. In P. Pearse, above all, Cuchulain becomes a conscious imitation of Christ, whose death would be followed by the resurrection of the Catholic people of Ireland. The authors highlight the fact that the liturgical quality of the behaviour of the 1916 leaders, particularly Pearse, disrupted the old correlation between Church and the U.I.L. by, however briefly, enlisting the support of the Church's intellectuals. The authors similarly claim that the form of the Easter Rising ensured the subsequent supremacy of Catholicism in Ireland.

In chapter 6, Cairns and Richards begin by outlining the way in which Sinn Féin became the new leader of the people-nation after 1916 by absorbing a host of former supporters of the U.I.L. together with its dominant ideology grounded on familism and Catholicism. They argue that this explains why, for example, the consolidation of the Free State took a radical form in foreign affairs, seeking to develop its dominion status, but a conservative one at home. This led to a new form of colonisation, that of the spirit, manifested in an increasing submission of the State to theocracy and in a powerful equation of sex with sin, which was bitterly condemned by isolated voices such as Yeats. The authors also tackle D. Corkery's critical works, which they claim were centrally important in marginalising not only the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, but also the urban working-class of the new State. Not surprisingly, then, S. O'Casey did not pass Corkery's test of Irishness. According to Cairns and Richards, who support their argument by

detailed reference to the realities of Dublin tenement life, O'Casey's internationalist and socialist stance led him, particularly in the Dublin trilogy, to question not nationalist politics *per se*, but rather the concept of the nation which had become hegemonic and which grossly ignored the plight of the workers. Other critical voices, such as J. Joyce's in *Ulysses*, S. O'Faolain's, P. Kavanagh's, F. O'Brien's, and that of *The Bell*, are also discussed.

An objection to be made to *Writing Ireland* is that, despite the authors' highlighting the central role of the discourse of sexuality in the constitution of the Irish people-nation, there is an almost complete absence of the women's contribution to the cultural struggle the book masterfully explores. A similar complaint is made by K. Barry in a recent review of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* (1991), where he notes the «lamentable dearth of scholarship about women's writing in Ireland» (*The European English Messenger*, (1992), 1, 3: 47). In Cairns and Richards's study, some women's names are merely dropped, none of them belonging to the contemporary scene, where they include B. Friel, S. Heaney, T. Murphy and T. Paulin among others, and only the canonical Lady Gregory and Maud Gonne are given more attention. To compensate for this, the reader will have to turn to other sources, such as P. Boumelha and T. Foley, *In the Shadow of his Language* (1987); C.L. Innes, *Women, Ireland and Literature* (1989); and the anthologies A.A. Kelly (ed.), *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present* (1987); and A. Smyth (ed.), *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing* (1989).

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G. AUSTIN, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990. 139 pages.

Starting off from the belief that a feminist approach to anything means paying attention to women as characters, writers, readers or audience members, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* is a lucid attempt at demonstrating the usefulness as critical tools for the analysis of drama of feminist theories drawn from four areas of study: literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, and film theory. As Austin points out, the field of dramatic criticism has been relatively slow to acknowledge the work of feminist theorists and to incorporate it, so that her book, combining a theoretical and a practical side, stands both as a welcome synthesis of the work done in the four selected areas of study, and as a demonstration of its possibilities when applied to drama. It is also a useful companion piece to S.-E. Case's feminist revision of theatrical history, *Feminist Theatre* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988).

In the opening chapter, the author is explicit about the aims and limitations of her project. Thus, she discusses the advantages and shortcomings of the three major political branches of feminism, liberal, cultural/radical and materialist, and overtly identifies herself as a materialist feminist. She also states that her purpose is not to develop a monolithic theory of feminist dramatic criticism, or indeed any new theory, but rather to present a number of theories in the four fields of study since the latest wave of feminist scholarship began (approximately in 1970) and to apply some of them to specific plays drawn from contemporary American drama, both by playwrights in the traditional canon (Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman and Sam